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AUTHOR Christensen, Douglas D.
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ABSTRACT

This manual covers the fundamentals of managing student activities, including program management, budget guidelines and cost-cutting methods, and ways to gain support for the student activities program. General advice is provided in the opening section on initial assessment of program options, setting priorities, and resource allocation. The second section provides a three-part scheme for planning a student activities budget: an educational plan, a cost plan, and a revenue plan. The third section concerns public relations, including communication planning, writing of news articles, and disseminating research information. The fourth section provides a list of ideas used by school districts across the country to reduce student activity costs. Last is a note on the future of student activities. An appendix provides examples of forms useful in planning and budgeting student activities. (TE)

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Managing Student Activities

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Managing Student Activities

by Douglas D. Christensen

Division of Student Activities
National Association of Secondary School Principals

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Douglas D. Christensen is superintendent of the Colby Unified School District in Kansas. He is also the author of NASSP's *Planning and Evaluating Student Activity Programs.*

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National Association of Secondary School Principals
1904 Association Dr., Reston, Va. 22091

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Foreword

"Be true to your own art, and congratulate yourself if you have done something strange and extravagant, and broken the monotony of a decorous age. It was a high council that I once heard given to a young person: 'always do what you are afraid to do.'"

Ralph Waldo Emerson

For those of us committed to student activities programs, Emerson's observation may have special merit. We know that the learning experience must go beyond the classroom to the space where the student council convenes, to the cheerleading camp, to the speech tournament, to the dark room frequented by the photography club, and the crowded chamber where the school newspaper is carefully edited.

It is in these various places that students discover something "strange and extravagant"—themselves. Personalities emerge. Talents are uncovered. Friendships are made and leaders realized.

For some, student activities involvement is easily attained. The essential fact, however, is that all students deserve and need the opportunities that a well-rounded student activities program provides.

With that premise in mind, this manual explores program management, budget guidelines and cost-cutting methods, and ways to gain support for the student activities program. Helpful charts and worksheets have been included as well.

Finally, although this text covers the fundamentals of managing student activities, it is your enthusiasm and personal commitment that will continue to chart the future of student activities. For being "true to your own art" may we congratulate you and add our thanks.

Terrence J. Giroux
Director
NASSP, Division of Student Activities

Managing Student Activities

Student activities programs are under considerable stress due to economic problems and budget cuts. In some cases, student activities programs are completely cut from the curriculum as an unaffordable "luxury."

Such drastic measures can be avoided if the manager of student activities realizes the important role student programs play in the total curriculum. Among the advantages to be gained from student activities are the opportunities provided for meaningful and satisfying relationships between students and adults. Such relationships benefit everyone.

Support for student activities, both emotional and financial, must be cultivated. By following the steps outlined in this book, those responsible for student activities will discover that an activities program, if properly managed, is beneficial not only to students, but to the faculty, administration, and community as well.

Where To Start

Once a commitment to student activities is made—and the important role it plays in the total curriculum is recognized—management must assess the programs and services currently being offered. Find out what's popular and what isn't, what makes money and what doesn't, what serves students well and what doesn't.

Assessing activities programs can be done in a variety of ways, depending on each school's particular program.

The form on page 20 is useful in gaining a general overview of what a school is currently offering in its cocurricular program. The form has a space to enter the name of the activity, its purpose, the number of participants, and the revenues it generates.

A more detailed report of each activity can be made on a separate sheet, which should list the sponsoring organization and adviser (see page 21 for a sample of this form).

Rating the Results

After data concerning the student activities program is collected, managers should ask the following questions:

- Is the goal of the activity relevant to the goals of the curriculum?
- Do a large number of students benefit from the activity?
- Do the costs of the program match the benefits gained?
- Are the revenues sufficient to support costs effectively?

Use the following formula (see page 22) to rate the answers given to the above questions:

1. **Program Name.** Enter the name of the program.
2. **General Purpose.** Rate the stated purpose for each program listed.
   1 = Congruent with district/school philosophy.
   2 = Moderately congruent with district/school philosophy.
   3 = Lacks general congruency with district/school philosophy.
3. **Number of Participants.** Rate the number of students participating for each program listed.
   1 = High levels of participation in all grades.
   2 = Moderate participation across and within grade levels (some grades not represented and/or limited participation in specific grades for which the activities are intended).
   3 = Minimal participation across, as well as within, grade levels.
4. **Costs per Participant.** On a separate worksheet, list the total per pupil costs for each program. List them in ascending order beginning with the lowest. Next, divide the list into three ranges of cost that represent the most homogeneous category for each range.
   1 = Lowest range
   2 = Moderate range
   3 = Highest range.

5. **Revenue per Pupil.** On a separate worksheet, list the total revenues per pupil for each program. List these figures in descending order beginning with the highest. Next, divide the list into three ranges of revenue that represent the most homogeneous category for each range.

   1 = Highest range
   2 = Moderate range
   3 = Lowest range.

6. **Total.** Enter the total rating for each program listed. The total is determined by adding the individual ratings to each category.

   TOTAL = [(2) + (3) + (4) + (5)]

7. **Average.** Enter the average rating for each program listed. The average rating is determined by dividing the total by the number of categories added.

   $$\text{AVERAGE} = \frac{\text{Total}}{4}$$

Interpreting the Results

Each school district should determine procedures for judging the results of assessments such as this one. For example, using the four categories listed here (general purpose, number of participants, costs per pupil, and revenue per pupil), the average ratings can be interpreted as follows:

1 = Programs that closely agree with school district philosophy, allow for high student participation across grade levels, are low in per pupil costs, and are high in revenue per pupil.

2 = Programs that moderately agree with the above criteria.

3 = Programs that have little in common with the above criteria.

Programs that are high in per pupil costs and low in per pupil revenue should not be automatic targets for reduction or elimination. But the maintenance of such programs should be based upon full awareness of the cost-revenue ratio involved.

Information collected during assessment procedures should give administrators an accurate picture of the current state of affairs in the student activities program. One of the major functions of this assessment procedure is to provide administrators with a data-based picture of the current situation.

Management decisions concerning student activities should be based upon data so that emotional decisions are minimized. Decisions related to cutting costs, reducing programs, and financing services in particular should be made in as objective a fashion as possible. The chart of information provided in the assessment process should provide a means of dealing with activities programs and services based upon current conditions and future potential.

Financial Decisions

Using data to back up financial decisions regarding student activities makes the administrator's job easier. When reviewing the data, the principal should look at the total program being offered, rather than each individual activity. It is the context and the impact of the program upon the total organization that must be considered by the administrator.

It is also important that administrators who manage student activities programs keep in mind that these programs are a part of the total curriculum.

When allocating resources to support specific programs and services in student activities, the principal should ask: "What would happen if this program were to drop out of sight tomorrow?" If it's difficult to come up with good reasons to keep it, it probably has a limited impact on the total organization.

Setting Priorities

A second way of making management decisions regarding resources for student activities programs is to determine priorities. Once again, it is imperative to have data upon which to base decisions. Review the data and give priority to those organizations that come closest to meeting their stated purpose. In addition, organizations whose purposes are more broadly congruent with the purposes of the total curriculum should have priority. Other influential factors include the number of students involved and cost effectiveness.

Managing and financing student activities is usually not an either-or proposition. Rarely is it a question of having activities or not having them at all. More often it is a question of level—how much and what types.

Economy is important in activities as it is in any other expenditures, public or private, organizational or individual. Economy, however, does not mean "cheap." It does not necessarily mean to reduce. Sometimes it's a way of getting more results from the same input. Eliminating unjustified expenditures is essential, but so is getting the most for your money, time, and personnel. One of the most effective ways to economize in student activities is to get better results from current programs.

Something for Everyone?

Over the years clubs, organizations, and sports have expanded in an attempt to provide opportunities for all students to participate according to need, interest, and ability. As a result, some activities may only marginally relate to the purposes of school as an educational institution.

Attempting to offer something for everyone has contributed to current stresses on resources for activities including money, time, personnel, and space. Student activities programs have reached a point where good intentions (offering something for everyone) may have more negative effects than positive.

Schools need not, and should not, be the only communitywide institutions providing educational and social opportunities for young people. Often, other community organizations are better equipped to handle activities such as intramurals, car clubs, fraternities, sororities, cooking and sewing clubs, and rodeo clubs to name a few.

In some communities, however, the high school may be the only institution capable of providing additional educational experiences outside of the regular classroom. In such cases, the schools and the community must exercise some measure of selectivity, deciding which activities best provide for and meet student needs. Resources should then be concentrated on these activities.

To fail to be selective may result in a substantial erosion of resources to the point that all programs are underfinanced and understaffed. Or, some activities will be allocated more than an equitable share of resources at the expense of other activities.

Needs Versus Wants

A contributing factor to the proliferation of student activities and lack of selectivity on the part of schools, is the inability to differentiate between needs and wants. Often, needs and wants are treated as one and the same.

The student activities manager may want to offer everything from a basket-weaving club to a debate team, but his or her budget may not allow it. Unless schools have unlimited resources, student activities continue to take up part of the budget. New activities must wedge their way into the competition and gain support at the expense of existing programs.

The student activities manager must weigh wants versus needs, use the data from the assessment study, and then plan the activities program. After decisions are reached concerning which activities will be offered, the program manager is then ready to write a budget.

Budgeting for Student Activities

Budgets are necessary to support most programs and services. In fact, budgets are often critical factors that can make or break a program. If there isn't enough financial support, some programs are unable to attain their stated purposes and goals. With that in mind, the student activities budget must be planned in as careful and complete a manner as possible.

It's best to plan a student activities budget in three parts.

• **Educational Plan.** For student activities, the educational plan is based upon the following considerations:

1. *Goals and objectives* for the upcoming fiscal year.
2. *Priorities*, which may include goals and objectives for the upcoming fiscal year.
3. *Special plans or programs* to be carried out during the upcoming fiscal year.

It's sometimes difficult for students and their advisers to define educational programs or plans in advance. But by following a step-by-step process, establishing goals and objectives is easy. For example, the manager should:

1. Review the identified philosophies and purposes of the organization.
2. Discuss with building-level administrators the emphasis that should be placed on each program.
3. Ask for input from staff members and students concerning ideas to implement identified purposes.

Priorities can be established in much the same manner. The following steps should serve as effective guidelines to establish priorities:

1. What goals or objectives should have top priority for the upcoming fiscal year?
2. What activities, programs, or ideas need attention or improvement?

3. What should the membership of each group be doing that it isn't already doing?
4. What are the expectations of students, staff, administrators, parents, and patrons of this organization?

The educational plan represents the base of the total budget. It is the reason for the other two parts of the budget to exist.

• **Cost Plan.** Costs should be planned in segments identified in the educational plan. Each goal or objective is individually planned for financially so that it isn't left to chance or without sufficient support.

Use the "Planning Guide" (page 23) as an example of how to plan for specific goals, objectives, events, and activities. Keep in mind that costs are estimated under the heading "Resources Needed."

• **Revenue Plan.** The third part of the budget identifies income upon which organizations may reasonably depend to support their programs and activities. Revenue plans identify and estimate revenue to be received from various sources.

It is best to identify estimated revenue from each identified source. The total is also estimated.

The form on page 24 suggests a format for revenue planning as well as various revenue sources to be considered.

The budget should be kept as simple as possible, but detailed enough so that members, advisers, and administrators can understand the various categories of expenditures and their relationships to the purposes of the organization.

The "Budget Action Plan" form (page 25) can be used to develop budgets for a large group or for a small committee. Each small committee should submit the same form to an executive committee of the larger organization. The executive committee would then pull together the individual budgets of the small committees into one overall budget.

Reporting Financial Transactions

There are many forms that can be used to report financial transactions. Samples of these reporting forms are on pages 26, 27, and 28.

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Rationing Plans

Allocating financial resources to student activities programs and services should be based upon the assessment study described earlier. With that data on hand, the program manager should:

1. Write down the name of each program or service.
2. Identify resources necessary to support the activity.
3. Identify current usage of resources.
4. Project financial support for each activity.

By using a Resource Allocations Worksheet (page 29), the program manager is able to determine how much support to give each activity. For example, if a decision is made to maintain funding at current levels for a specific program, then 100 percent would be awarded to that particular program.

An increase in funding for some programs could be identified on any kind of scale by using 1, 5, 10, or any other percentage. The same would be true for decreases in funding. It's even possible to use the same chart to increase some programs, decrease others, and continue to maintain a balance of current funding levels for all programs and services. The final amount to be awarded to each program is entered under the "Decision" column.

Other Rationing Plans

A similar format can be used in rationing other resources. Use gasoline as an example. In districts or buildings that are trying to reduce transportation costs, one effective means of doing so is to ration the gasoline that would be allocated in support of travel for programs or services.

The same worksheet (page 35) can be used to identify the gas in terms of the number of gallons to be allocated. Once again, follow these steps:

1. Enter the *name* of the program or service.
2. Identify the *resource*, which in this case is gasoline.
3. Identify the *current use* amount by specifying the number of gallons currently used by the program, or identify the amount expended during the previous year for gasoline.
4. Identify the *allocation percentage* or amount to be provided.
5. Enter the *decision* made based upon the factors considered.

Public Relations

Once the student activities program is decided upon and financial support for it is pledged, it's time to gain support from the public. But before that can happen, the program manager must plan a campaign that will educate the public about what is being offered, why it's being offered, and the benefits that are reaped when students are involved in co-curricular activities.

The general public is often unaware of the purposes and goals of student activities and knows little about what students are doing to accomplish those goals. A good public relations program will remedy that situation.

Public relations should be organized and planned with specific purposes in mind. Take note, however, that mass advertising is not synonymous with public relations. There is little need to "sell" the merit of student activities to anyone.

Planning a public relations campaign is not difficult. Four components are all that are needed to establish effective relationships with the various publics in the school community.

- **Identify Audiences.** The first step is to identify the program's audiences. Who in the school community needs to know what is going on? Usual audiences for student activities include students, faculty, administrators, boards of education, parents, and patrons.

When planning public relations for specific groups and activities, the audience will be more focused than for a broad-interest program.

- **What Do They Need To Know?** The second step is to find out what each audience wants and needs to know. That can be done simply and quickly by completing a brief questionnaire or by conducting personal interviews.

A sample questionnaire might include the following:

School-Community Relations Survey
Information Assessment

1. You are a:
   - ☐ Student, grade _____
   - ☐ Faculty member
   - ☐ Parent
   - ☐ Principal, Asst. Principal
   - ☐ Superintendent, Asst. Superintendent
   - ☐ Board of Education member
   - ☐ Other _____

2. You are interested in knowing more about

   _____
   (enter name of activity)

3. What information would you like to have available that is not currently being offered?
   - ☐ Purposes, goals
   - ☐ Membership
   - ☐ Officers
   - ☐ Activities
   - ☐ Other _____

4. Is there other specific information about this organization that you need or want to know?

   _____

   _____

   _____

5. You prefer receiving this information in the following forms:

☐ Written	☐ Special mailings	☐ Speeches, presentations
☐ News items		☐ Forums, discussions
☐ Bulletins	☐ Radio	☐ TV
	☐ Verbal	☐ Other _____.

• **Link Audiences to Processes.** Next, link audiences with the information they want and need. Most individuals have preferences for the way in which information is received. Some prefer reading, while others prefer auditory, visual, or combined audiovisual modes. Communication should be based

upon the means that are efficient and effective with respect to audiences, not senders.

Consider effects that "catch an audience's eye or ear." Graphics and layout are important, but should not distort the message.

- **Follow Up and Monitor.** The last step is to find out if audiences are receiving the intended messages. This can be done by conducting formal or informal surveys. The surveys should also reveal any negative or counterproductive feelings audiences may have toward the information they are receiving.

Communication is often more effective when information is personalized. With that in mind, public relations efforts should focus on communicating the "people" stories of student activities.

Here are some personalization hints:

- Emphasize the benefits the audience will receive with each activity.
- Identify how investments are being used.

The general public has always been an active recipient of news, both good and bad, about schools and the effects of programs upon students. The popularity of stories about competency-based education, back-to-basics efforts, and achievement score declines attest to the public's interest in schools and in the performance of students in response to instruction. Generally, the more personalized the communication, the more effective it is in reaching individuals in an audience.

Planning Communication

Communication in any form is most effective if it is clear and designed with its specific audience in mind, along with a clear intention of its objectives. Use the following as an example of planning communication:

Audience:	General Public
Information wanted/needed:	General levels of achievement of students in science, math, and social studies.

Objectives: The general public will be supportive of school programs if student achievement is within levels of expectation.

Means/Process: News stories identifying achievement scores of students on ITED, ACT, SAT, and CBE tests.

For a detailed "Communication Planner," see page 30.

Writing a News Article

Newspapers are a low-cost way to reach many people and to publicize an organization or activity. When writing an article, remember to keep it people-oriented. The following news articles illustrate the different slants one story can take.

Example of Ineffective News Article

John Jones, a 17-year-old senior from Anytown High School, received notice of appointment to the Air Force Academy. Jones, the son of Mr. and Mrs. John Jones, Sr., will graduate from Anytown High School in June.

Jones has been an active participant in athletics, earning letter awards in football and track. In addition, Jones currently ranks 15th in his class of 417 students.

Jones' appointment, announced by Congressman Perry Public, will be effective September 1, 1984. Jones will report for duty and basic training July 1, 1984.

This story is not appropriate for its purpose. While Mr. and Mrs. Jones, Sr., family, relatives, and friends will undoubtedly be excited, the story will communicate effectively to a limited audience. The intended audience is not effectively reached. The general public would be more interested in the following story.

Example of Effective News Article

Of the 417 graduating seniors of the class of 1984, 7 have received appointments to the United States military training academies.

The appointments were announced by Principal Harold Smith, following official confirmation from respective congressional representatives.

Of the seven receiving appointments, three have accepted placement in the Air Force Academy, two in West Point (Army), one in Annapolis (Navy), and one in the Merchant Marines. Fifteen additional students were notified of appointments as alternates. Alternates become eligible when candidates do not accept appointments.

Communicating Data

Almost all activities programs can benefit from publishing and disseminating research information. Such information, however, must also be personalized in order to be effectively received.

Research studies have consistently shown that participating in student activities is beneficial to students. Studies have shown, for example, that success in college (achievement) can be more accurately predicted from levels of achievement of individuals in such activities as debate, speech, drama, and journalism, than it can from any or all of the following:

- grades in high school
- class rank
- ACT scores
- grades in college.

Similarly, studies of school dropouts have consistently shown that students who leave school prior to graduation are students who are unlikely to participate in student activities.[1]

Parents who are aware of such information are more likely to encourage their children to participate in at least some activities in schools. Likewise, the general public may be more supportive.

[1] Ronald Joekel, "Student Activities: An Essential Part of a Total School Program," (*Catalyst*, Volume 2, December 1978, p. 5).

Cost-Cutting Tips

The following is a list of ideas used by various school districts across the country to reduce student activities costs. Many of the suggestions relate to athletic programs, which are one of the major resource areas for money, time, and people. This list is not intended to be inclusive of all cost-cutting procedures, but it is hoped that it will stimulate more innovative and creative ideas at the local district or building levels.

- Shorten athletic seasons.
- Provide buffer periods between athletic seasons, which would provide sufficient time for other activities to be effectively scheduled.
- Charge students fees to belong to an activities association.
- Seek private-sector financing. Many businesses within the community are usually willing to adopt an organization and provide some, if not all, funding for programs. The chamber of commerce, service clubs, and other organizations are likely possibilities.
- Increase participation by offering large-group activities.
- Offer credit, which may or may not count toward graduation, for legitimate leadership experience.
- Set up varsity activity seasons separate and independent of junior high seasons.
- Eliminate play-offs.
- Set up criteria for entering district or regional play-offs. For example, in order to enter play-offs or district competitions, teams must have a specified winning percentage.
- Cut traveling squads to essential numbers of players.

- Use coaches' aides as opposed to certified professionals.
- Charge participation fees with a waiver for those students who do not have the economic means to participate.
- Eliminate duplication wherever programs are already offered in the community.
- Set up cost-reduction teams to complete comprehensive studies of existing programs and services.
- Share facilities and equipment with neighboring schools.
- Pool activity funds into one account so that dormant funds can be invested in interest-bearing checking and savings accounts. Larger sums of money could be invested in certificates of deposit for funds that lie idle for long periods of time, such as the summer months.
- Buy equipment and supplies in bulk.
- Buy supplies during the off season when prices are lower.
- Open school facilities for public use. Fees should be based upon a reasonable charge per hour.

The Future of Student Activities

Student activities programs are currently going through a transition period. Recent budget cuts have caused principals to look for ways to economize and student activities have been subject to close scrutiny.

In some cases, school districts and administrators have acted rashly and cut all support to student activities programs. But student programs can be economical if they are managed properly.

By practicing the suggestions made in this book, the program manager's job will be simplified and student activities programs will be saved. All it takes is a commitment to the knowledge that cocurricular activities play a vital role on campus—they improve school climate, they teach valuable lessons in leadership, and they serve as a creative outlet that cannot be attained inside the classroom.

The future of student activities lies in the hands of those who manage them. If program managers are prepared, committed, practical, and confident, the future of student activities is secure.

Appendix

Student Activities
Program Assessment Form

(1) PROGRAM	(2) GENERAL PURPOSE	(3) # of PARTICIPANTS						(4) COSTS/PARTICIPANT					(5) REVENUE/PARTICIPANT		
		7	8	9	10	11	12	Salaries	Supplies	Equip-ment	Other	Total	Fees/ Dues	Admiss.	Other

Budget Summary and Revenue Plan

19____ Organization: _____ Adviser: _____

REVENUE PLAN		BUDGET SUMMARY	
Amount	Source	Item/Event/Activity	Amount
		1.	
		2.	
		3.	
		4.	
		5.	
		6.	
ADDITIONAL REVENUE			
Amount	Source		
	TOTALS		

Student Activities Program Assessment
(Composite Rating)

(1) PROGRAM	RATINGS				COMPOSITE RATING	
	(2) Purpose	(3) Participation	(4) Costs	(5) Revenue	(6) Total	(7) Average

Planning Guide

Goal/Task/Event:

Specific Concern:

Purpose—

Level of Importance/
Significance—

Involvement—

Deadline—

Other—

Action Plan:

Revenue Planner

SOURCE	ESTIMATE
Membership dues, fees	
Fund-raising activities:	
Contributions/allocations from district or school funds	
Admissions, ticket sales	
Miscellaneous revenue	
TOTAL	

Budget Action Plan

WHAT NEEDS TO BE DONE	WHO IS RESPONSIBLE	RESOURCES NEEDED	DEADLINE
1.			
2.			
3.			
4.			
5.			
6.			

EVALUATION: How is the goal/tasks/event to be evaluated in terms of success?

Sample Form for Reporting Financial Information

STUDENT COUNCIL
STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS

Month:_____ Year:_____ Amount Budgeted:_____

Account	Expenditures		Receipts		Balance
	Month	To Date	Month	To Date	
TOTALS					

Sample Ledger Sheet

Account_____ # _____ Amount Budgeted:_____					
Date	Transaction	Amount Received	Amount Expended	Running	Balance

Sample Ledger Sheet
(for double entry)

Date	Transaction	Amount		Account	All Funds Balance
		Received	Expended		

Student Activities
Resource Allocations

Program	Resource(s)	Current Use/ Amount	Increase Allocation Decrease												Decision
					130%	120%	110%	100%	90%	80%	70%	60%			

Communication Planner

Goal: (What is to be accomplished?) _____

_____

_____

Audience(s)	Information Wanted/ Needed	Specific Objective(s) To Be Accomplished	Process/Means Responsibility

Evaluation: _____

_____

_____